

# The Golden Chain

Alumni Journal of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education



## MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS

Mother said many times: “Whoever gets my touch, whoever has a second of true aspiration, true love for me, he is finished for life, for all lives — he is bound to me. I have put a golden chain round his neck, his heart is bound eternally to me.”

It is a thing nobody can see, you yourselves don’t see; but it is a fact, it is there. The golden chain is there within your heart. Wherever you go, you drag that chain, it is a lengthening chain. However far you may go, it is an elastic chain, it goes on lengthening, but never snaps. In hours of difficulty, in hours of doubt and confusion in your life, you have that within you to support you. If you are conscious of it, so much the better; if you are not conscious, believe that it is there. The Mother’s love, Her Presence is there always.

Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta (to the final-year students of the Higher Course on October 26, 1976)

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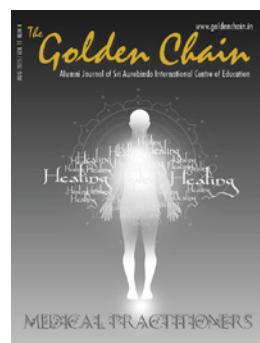
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## THE EDITORS' PAGE

by Sunayana '79

One of the most fascinating stories of the old days of the Ashram is the one about Kobi Nishikanto. He was suffering from a number of illnesses, his main problems being diabetes and blood pressure. Nishikanto had asked the Mother in 1955 to keep him alive till the April Darshan of 1956. The Mother had assured him that he would live till that day but she had also asked him to come and see her on that day, no matter in what condition he was. Three days before that day the doctors had said Nishikanto was so ill that he would die any moment. But he managed to stay alive till the Darshan day. So in the evening of 24th April 1956 Nishikanto was taken on a stretcher to the Meditation Hall. The Mother came down and took his hand in hers. With very little strength in his body he whispered to her asking the Mother to place her foot on his chest. She held on to Pranab-da for balance and gently placed her right foot on his chest and granted his wish. He clutched it with his hands. Then he was taken home. And, believe it or not, he lived for another 17 years!

In my mind, this mystery stayed on for many years. Sitting in my class-room waiting for the teacher to come, or waiting for the captains to call the “rassemblement” at the Sports-ground or coming back to the Playground in the bus, I pondered about what really happened when the Mother placed her foot on Nishikanto’s chest. How did she heal him? Could the touch of the Mother’s foot have brought down his blood-sugar level? Was he cured because of his intense happiness? How compassionate of the Mother to have actually agreed to his last wish of putting her foot on his chest! The line from Savitri, “To heal with her feet the aching throb of life” took on a whole new meaning for me because, in fact, the Mother had pulled Nishikanto back from the jaws of death.

Anyway, one thing was clear. A physical

illness could be healed by a spiritual force. The Mother has said that all illnesses are the result of an inner disharmony. In today’s world very few will refute the mind-body connection. How can we apply this knowledge to the actual healing of a person’s suffering? Can we, the common people, make use of this knowledge to prevent illnesses from starting in the first place. In the fight against suffering could this knowledge not become a weapon?

On one side there is medical science and on the other side there is an occult reality. What connects the two? How deeply can we know the inner reality of anyone? Do doctors need the help of intuition over and above their rational knowledge? Medical science has evolved so much that today people live longer and more pain-free lives than ever before. It is something to marvel at. At the same time there are so many alternate forms of healing which have gained acceptance.

In this issue we have asked our former students who have worked as medical practitioners to tell us something about their training and work. It is interesting to see their journey from their student days in SAICE to the point at which they are today. There are many others from our large circle of alumni who are in this field and whom we have not yet contacted and from whom we hope to get some more insights too. There are some who have not had the time to answer our questions in time before this issue goes to press. They will surely also have very interesting inputs which we will include in our next issue. The deeper one gets into it the more fascinating it becomes because here is a field where spirituality can be “applied”, so to speak.

To come back to the story of Nishikanto, did the Mother then re-establish his inner harmony by touching her foot to his chest? Inner harmony. Two beautiful words. And to think that they could put half the hospitals and pharmaceutical companies of the world out of business! ☸

# A LABOUR OF LOVE

**Lopa Mukherjee '94** is an accomplished author and has published two novels and a collection of short stories. She has also scripted and produced several documentaries on a variety of topics around Indian culture and spirituality, two topics that are very close to her heart. In this candid interview with **Meera Guthi '95**, she talks about her inspirations, her process of writing and reminisces about her SAICE days.

**You have published three books, two novels — *Three Rivers of Tears*, *The Soma People* and a collection of short stories — *East West Crossroads*. Which book is closest to your heart and why?**

Since all three are like my children I ought not to be partial; but I cannot forget the excitement I felt when I was working on my first book. I poured everything I had into it. For an entire year I did a lot of research on Indian history and culture and learnt a lot, and I did not read any other book, not even a magazine; I did not want to be influenced by other authors' styles.

Each milestone was a big event — the publisher's acceptance, finding the book title, choosing the cover design, doing the proofs... The other books are half the size of the first, and they were less painful to "deliver", although all three are a labour of love.

**Each author has his or her own method of writing. What would you say works best for you? Can you share your writing process?**

When I am passionate about a topic I write about it. Social injustice is very close to my heart and I expressed it in *Three Rivers of Tears*. In fact the whole story is about the fractured birth of the Indian subcontinent. I did documentaries

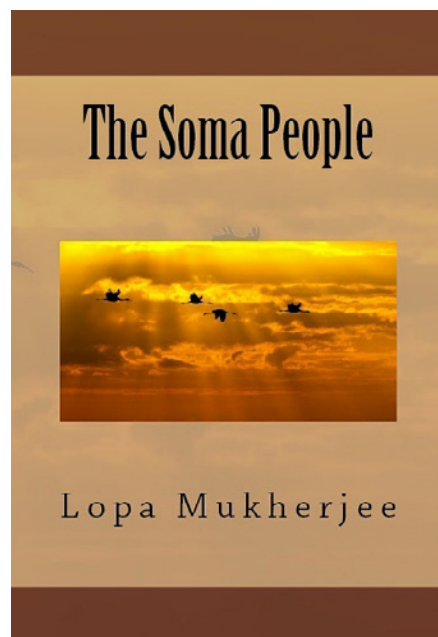
addressing these pain points within me — the ill-treatment of lower castes for example.

I am also passionate about the state of women in India. *Three Rivers of Tears* has two women as protagonists, a mother and her daughter, and several stories from *East West Crossroads* have women protagonists.

*The Soma People*, my third book, however, was inspired by something quite other than social inequity or women's issues. I was inspired by Sri Aurobindo's *Record of Yoga*. But again it was passion for that subject that drove me. I collected evidence from other yogis who were practising what Sri Aurobindo wrote about. Often yogis did not share their esoteric lives, but seekers travelling around India found them and related their experiences in travel-

ogues. One such person is Promod Kumar Chatopadhyay, also the artist who painted Mother and Sri Aurobindo's darshan portrait that hangs in the mediation hall in the Ashram.

**All the three books are of different genres and require different writing techniques. One is a historical fiction, the other a spiritual quest and the third, short stories. Which genre did you find most challenging and how did you overcome those challenges?**



## EXCERPT FROM *THE SOMA PEOPLE*

Here is the ending of *The Soma People*. A yogi is speaking:

"So you want to know what Aum is... let me see... When born, our first cry begins with 'A'. And the last breath we utter ends in 'M'. In between is the wonder and the questioning and the despair and the growing. In between is the stumble and the fall, the walk and the run. The geometry of lines, the geometry of relationships, the geometry of doubt wrinkling the face. And the questioning. Why is this happening to me? Why am I here? And the forgetting. The duties taking over. The schooling, the earning. A pursuit. A love. The inter-braiding with other lives. Disentangling. Re-entangling in other forms.

And the knocking goes on. The knocking of the fledgling's beak against the egg shell. There is something beyond the shell. Even beyond the grand egg shell, the universe. And then the crimes of ambition. The gilded chains, the

savior swords. Success with its lizard eyes watching our every move. The knocking resumes, more urgently. Then the respite of forgetting. The gloating in glory, the bloating of the ego. Death of a near one. Moments of clarity. Always a relative clarity. Then return of the cycles.

Suddenly disease — that stark reminder. Breeding helplessness. Bringing humility. If we are lucky. Otherwise bitterness. And again the refrain of questioning. What was the purpose? And my purpose? Was there a goal? That I perchance missed? And the despondency that eats at the soul's roots. Have I cheated myself? And the world falls away. Instantly. The groping. The knocking. Is the shell giving way? A parting of clouds. The sun streaming in. And one day the last utterance 'M'. From the first to the last breath all we did was utter a long Aum. All our life is nothing but a single Aum that the mighty Sacrificer offers to the Fire. And while he pours the oblation He chants 'Aum'."

I find it easier to write short stories. Writing a large novel which will capture and retain a reader's interest till the end is a challenge as is finding the right balance between all my informative research and the story-telling aspect. And here is where a good editor can help. I am not sure I overcame this challenge at all when I wrote my first novel, especially since it is 500 pages long, and I realize not many read such long and serious books. So I kept my last novel at 150 pages, omitting lengthy conversations and descriptions and making shorter chapters.

**You work as a software engineer during the day and moonlight as a writer at night. How do you bridge these two diverse worlds?**

I would have liked to engage entirely in creative work, such as scriptwriting, film making, and of course literature, but unfortunately there are no venture capitalists here! So, I need to keep my day job to pay for my evening passions! And since my job doesn't challenge me creatively, I lose momentum. For long periods of time I do not write anything. Then something catches my interest and I dive in, immersing myself totally

into it. I am not a disciplined writer. In fact there are times I doubt the process. Writing about human suffering can drag me down. But writing about the spiritual quest — now, that is a different experience.

**What are your most cherished memories growing up in the Ashram?**

There are just too many! Going to Sri Aurobindo's room on my birthday, Christmas, novelty races, Knowledge program, Prix d'excellence, practising for 2nd December, story sessions, the films in playground, and of course, the rain.

I remember when I was in A2, on rainy days, we watched the gymnast, Nadia Comaneci's film. In B2 during the rain, athletics days were transformed into football games! And watching the wise old sea, so vulnerable when it rained and how we rushed out to see the billowing waves, while Baby-di screamed above the roaring wind and rain, saying that she would send us to Nursing Home if we got sick. But the rain never punished us; it gave us freedom and joy!

*Continued on page 9...*



# THE MAKER FAIR 2015

*Pranav (K2), Purushottam '80 and Vikas '02, write about the Maker Fair 2015 – a science and technology based exhibition that was held at SAICE at the end of July 2015.*

In September 2013, a few students of SAICE, who believed in 'learning by doing', took a leap of faith in the unknown, and called it *The First Flight*. The next year, in August

give this year's edition a significant boost by introducing the Arduino.

The Arduino is a versatile microcontroller that provides a platform to conveniently use various sensor-based inputs along with computer programming to bring a whole variety of ideas to life. Thus the 'Science Fair' got a major shot in the arm, widened its scope and evolved into the 'Maker Fair'.

The organisers met interested students from EAVP 3 to Knowledge 3rd year, for hour-long sessions, thrice a week for three weeks in May 2015, in a workshop that explained the basics of programming and using the Arduino. These evening classes were pulsating with ideas and energy with the organisers improvising the teaching based on the students' requirements and getting electronic parts from the market after group just before the class.



Pushan leads the workshop on using the Arduino

2014, gathering new way-farers on the path, they continued with *Small Steps* which kept the flame of scientific adventure burning. This time round, in July 2015, *The Maker Fair* took the participation of students to a whole new level, and seems to have established the annual exhibition of science and technology based projects, in the mind-space of SAICE.

For the last couple of years, about a dozen projects were on display, and the initial number of entries for this year's exhibition too was hovering around the same number. That's when three Knowledge students, Pranav, Pushan and Vinay, enthusiastic participants, mentors and organisers of the previous science exhibitions, decided to



A batch of students test their code with the Arduino

The workshop was initiated with the intention of exposing students to electronics and computer

science, subjects often considered technical, difficult and dull, through a project-based fun activity. The Arduino is also a great tool in the hands of artists as it enables them to express themselves through technology. Thus non-science students were also motivated to join the workshop.

The workshop served as a springboard for this year's exhibition and doubled the number of projects, giving birth to a host of innovative projects and ideas by the end of May.

Thereafter the students and organisers worked in the evenings for 2 months, with their effort culminating in the exhibition on 31st July 2015. In addition to the support from the past team of guides and the various Ashram departments, this year Kumar-bhai, Pota-da and Prabuddha-da actively helped in the projects.

Through the project the students learned important skills such as team work, communicating with peers and guides, planning, problem-solving and they got practical work-experience and exposure to a lot of new ideas in a short span of time. By improvising on existing projects, students got a taste of what was possible with the resources at their disposal. On the other hand some of the projects were manifestations of original ideas that emerged during interactions between the students and their guides.

For all the projects, the emphasis was not on success in the conventional sense but in sharing the idea, the effort behind and the immersive learning experience that the students underwent in the preparation of their project. Their efforts and struggles were ultimately rewarded by the joy of learning, discovering and creating.

Given below is a summary of each project:

## ABSTRACT ART

Yogita (E4) wanted to fuse her interest in art, science and technology to create an Arduino controlled, triangle-shaped container with different compartments for different colours which would be released along with rotary movements, based on inputs such as sound, light and gestures. As



Yogita explains the various facets of her device

she was working on an innovative idea, it was challenging to translate it into a working model and thus needed more time to complete.

## BIO-FUEL

Amarnath (K2) converted waste vegetable oil which is a byproduct of cooking into a bio-fuel by making it react with Methanol and Sodium/Potassium Hydroxide. The resultant bio-fuel can



Amarnath's prize creation - a bottle of bio-fuel

be used as an alternative source of energy, which solves the following three problems:

Health risks associated with reuse of waste cooking oil.

Pollution caused by crude oil products.

Pollution of water bodies.

## BUBBLE-PLAY

Rajalaxmi (E6) created a mechanism that generated soap bubbles by dipping a frame in





Shashwat's camera sits atop the dolly

soap-water, and rotating the frame towards a fan that blew out soap bubbles at regular intervals.

### CAMERA DOLLY

Shashwat (K2), made a wooden frame with PVC pipe rails on which a camera sitting on a platform with wheels could move. The linear speed of the platform and the frequency of clicking could be controlled by external inputs to the Arduino.

### CENTRIFUGAL PUMP AND FLOATING FAUCET

Akash S. (E3) and Khushali (E3) learned the principles of how a centrifugal pump works by making a model of it. As an application of the pump they created an illusion wherein fluorescent water was falling from a tap in the middle of a room with no input to the tap, much to the astonishment of the visitors... until they were explained that water



Akash S. with his centrifugal pump

was just flowing up and down along an almost invisible transparent plastic tube connected to a dummy tap!

### CLAP SWITCH

What would you do if you entered the mosquito net before going to bed only to realise that you had forgotten to switch off the light? If you were Yashu (E5) you would simply clap and the light would go off, and clap again if you wanted the light to turn back on.

### CLOCK PROJECTOR

Riddhiman (E4) used a mirror, a light source and a clock to project the face of a clock on the ceiling in order to conveniently look at the time in the middle of the night.

### 'DRAWBOT'

When the rack & pinion atop a small cart move in the east-west direction while the cart



Vinay commands and the Drawbot obeys. One of Drawbot's many creations

is moving in the north-south direction, the resultant of the two perpendicular motions can make a pen connected to the device trace interesting patterns and even write names on paper. Overcoming mechanical, electronic and coding

hurdles Vinay (K1), Savera (E5) and Chirag (E4) successfully designed their innovative 'drawbot' that kept writing the names of visitors who fed inputs into a laptop.

### ENIGMA

Devarshi (E3), Rakshit (E4) and Tanay (E3) made a model of the famous encryption and decryption device 'Enigma' that was used during the World War to intercept messages. They needed more time to complete their project because of the complexity of the gear mechanisms and the numerous electrical connections. However they discussed the work they had done and simulated their machine on the laptop.



Utsarga activates his garden pathway lights

### GARDEN PATHWAY

Taking off from last year's project of a motion-sensor switch, Utsarga (K1) worked on an electronic circuit that would control a series of lights along a corridor or garden pathway.

### HYDROGEN GENERATOR

As an introduction to the basics of a fuel cell, Arnab (E3) and Arvind (E3) made a device to separate hydrogen and oxygen through the electrolysis of water.

### INFINITY MIRROR

Shavira (K2) sandwiched a ribbon of LED

lights between a large circular mirror and a circular glass piece to create an illusion of seven layers of LED lights obtained by multiple reflections.

### LAPTOP PROJECTOR

Joshua (E3) and Ishan (E3) attempted to make a laptop screen projector by using a Fresnel lens. They made a video of the entire manufacturing process to explain how their projector works.

### LASER COMMUNICATION

Pratik created a li-fi communication device as opposed to a wi-fi communication by using laser lights and sensors to transmit and receive information between two laptops. Unlike wi-fi, a laser light-based communication is more secure as it is less prone to hacking.

### LED GAME

Hans (E4) had a first taste of coding when along with Pranav (K2) he created a simple LED game where one had to maintain the bounce of an LED 'ball' by shifting the bouncing LED 'board'.

### MUSICAL LIGHTS

Ritam (E4) & Shambhavi (E4) created a musical instrument with lights, whose notes depended on how close you stood from it.

### PARAMETRIC WALL

Pushan (K3) worked on a technology used in futuristic architecture. His device will trace out the shape of a wall to be built with laser light reflected off two mirrors whose tilt would be controlled by hard-disc motors according to parametric equations fed into a computer. He hopes to develop the project to make versatile backdrops for plays.

### PELTIER REFRIGERATOR

By applying a voltage to a Peltier Unit, Yashu (E5) created a temperature difference between two surfaces, with heat dissipating off one plate and the cold plate cooling a small quantity of water.





Satya demonstrates the Rubik's Cube solver

### PIANO STAIRS

Divija (E3), Nishtha (E4) and Sanjana (E4) placed LED lights and sensors at opposite ends of each step of the staircase. As visitors climbed up the stairs, their feet blocked the light from reaching the sensor, triggering various notes of the piano, which were generated by the Arduino.

### RUBIK'S CUBE SOLVER

Kousheek (E3) and Satya (E3) developed a mechanical crane-like Rubik's Cube Solver, with ice-cream sticks. Their device held and turned a scrambled Rubik's cube in numerous successive double, perpendicular rotations to solve the Rubik's cube once the initial configuration of the cube was fed into a laptop. There are 43 quintillion (!) possible scrambled positions of the Rubik's cube, and their device could solve each one of them! They worked on their project for three months and it was much



Aurojyoti helps his robot to self-balance!

appreciated because of the complex mechanical, electronic and coding components.

### SECRET KNOCK DETECTOR

Naveen (E3) and Pabitra (E3) created a device that would open a rotary latch only when a door was knocked according to a pre-determined knocking pattern.

### SELF-BALANCING ROBOT

Aurojyoti (E3) attempted to create a self-balancing robot, with two wheels, whose vertical orientation would be gauged by an accelerometer which would, in turn, control the spinning of two motors in order to balance the robot.

### SMART CAR

Adit (E4) salvaged components from an old remote-controlled car to make a car that would avoid obstacles and follow obstacles, based on proximity sensor inputs.



Adit urges his smart car to follow him

### TIME MACHINE

Akash H. (E3) and Sandesh (E3) created a digital clock with 54 LEDs that would be controlled by a method called charlie-plexing.

### WATER SPARK

Tanushree (E6) made an electrostatic battery, which would get charged by flowing water. While the charge didn't accumulate sufficiently to discharge via a spark (because of the high humidity of Pondy's weather), she could measure a small voltage at the electrodes.

### WOLVERINE CLAWS

Sayan (E6) created a mechanical device that could be worn on the forearm with three switches that could be manipulated by the fingers in order to control three retractable blades in and out of



Sayan demonstrates the inside mechanism of his claw

the device. He taught himself to use a 3-D modelling software and set about making a physical prototype with precise dimensions only after his simulation worked on the computer.

A little over half of this year's projects were Arduino-based and gave the young students a taste of coding, algorithmic thinking and electronics. With greater exposure to technology and availability of tech-based solutions for even simple tasks, this trend will only continue. What needs to pass on is the spirit of learning, sharing and enabling others to succeed. It is thus that the Maker Fair will become a catalyst for peer-to-peer and project-based learning throughout the year, and foster an environment for the emergence of innovative ideas, creative solutions to problems and leadership qualities amongst our students. ☞



Hall of Harmony vibrant with visitors at the different stations

...Continued from page 3

*How do you think our institute has shaped you, your thinking and what you are today?*

The biggest contribution of the school was to expose me to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Their writings most importantly, but also the objects they used, the classroom where the Mother taught, the rooms where they lived, the people they blessed are all so many tangible nuggets of gold. Even when I am not in Pondicherry, I can recall the experience and feel Their Presence. Words cannot express, the soul within knows and feels grateful. Inspired by Mother's example of dealing with Indian society, and women in particular, I feel bold enough to question norms.

*You are also diversifying into becoming a cultural commentator and have made several videos on different aspects of Indian culture and the teachings of Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Is that something we can expect more of?*

I respect Indian spiritual culture and like to study its texts. What I see in the current state of Indian society makes me think the time is ripe for a new Renaissance. There is scope for improvement in every aspect of life — individual, collective and national. I make these cultural documentaries hoping that a new Golden Age will soon arrive. There's nothing original. Whatever I think is taken from Sri Aurobindo's *Bande Mataram* and his Bhavani Bharati vision of India. ☞



# MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS

*The attempt to cure people of illnesses and injuries has been around for centuries. Every civilisation has had its own methods. The ancient Egyptians, the Greeks, the Arabs, the Indians and the Chinese have all had their ways of bringing their sick and wounded back to good health. Modern medical science as we know it has been around for a century and a half with great leaps in discoveries every few years. And yet there are still a few mysteries left to be solved.*

*This of all sciences touches upon a zone which is in the domain of psychology, and that in turn is close to spirituality. This is what makes this profession so special in our eyes.*

*Not many of our alumni members have chosen to get into this line for their further studies or for their chosen profession. But we did find a few and contacted them. They have answered our questions and shared with us their experience in this field.*

## YOU MUST BECOME A GREAT DOCTOR

*Asha Umachigi '62H, the first Ashram student to take up Medicine, shares her journey.*

***Your father was a doctor so it must have been one of the reasons for your choosing this line. What were the other reasons for choosing the medical profession?***

Well, not only my father, but his father, that is my grandfather, was also a doctor. I recollect that right from the age of 4 I could think of nothing other than becoming a doctor. However, once I joined the Ashram School in 1951, I told myself that there was no way I could do medicine as the course here would not qualify me to enter a medical college...

There were not many other reasons except that I could do something to alleviate the suffering of people in India. This again stems from my father who was an ideal doctor.

I was also considering pursuing music as I was exposed to Hindustani classical music from an early age. Our hometown Gadag was the region from where hailed many stalwarts of the Kirana and Gwalior gharanas.

***You are among the earliest Ashram students who became a doctor. What was the Mother's answer when you informed Her that you wanted to pursue medical studies?***

As far as I can recollect I am the first Ashram



student to do medicine.

It was some time in the mid-fifties that two of my seniors, Arunkant Patel (Urmila-ben Patel's brother) and Praveen Nagda (Abhipsa's father) had just graduated from the Lycée Français de Pondichéry. They told me that some of their classmates had joined medicine in the just established Collège Médical (renamed as Jawaharlal Institute of Medical Sciences, JIPMER) in Pondicherry after completing Baccalauréat (Bac). This rekindled my hope to do medicine. I discussed it

with my father when he came for the Darshan in August 1959. To ascertain the situation for himself, he talked to Praveen (to whose family my father had been a physician in our home town), and we agreed that I should go to the Lycée and do my Bac which would make me eligible to join the medical college. He left Pondicherry instructing me to seek the Mother's permission.

Well, I approached the Mother with a lot of trepidation; for a moment no words would come out of my mouth! She gently coaxed me to tell Her what I wanted. The minute She heard me, what She told me was music to my ears! She said, "My child I am so happy you have got an aim in your life." I was absolutely floored and was on the floor at Her Lotus Feet! She enquired how I would get admitted to the Lycée and I answered, "I don't know, Mother." She immediately called Pavitra-da and asked him to do whatever was needed. She confirmed that my parents were not here in Pondicherry. She asked me which boarding I was staying in and I said, "Dortoir, Mother". I couldn't believe what I heard: "Continue staying there my child." Even after almost 56 years as I am writing this I have a lump in my throat!

I can never forget the day Pavitra-da took me to the Lycée in the Mother's car and got me admitted. The Mother had asked him to look after me. I met him often to show him my performance reports. He appreciated and guided me in many ways. He used to see my trimester reports and then take me to see the Mother. She took a lot of interest in the reports and encouraged me. At the end of each academic year, She would look at all the prizes I had won. She would comment on the books and the authors. Such sweetness and love could only come from Her! Now with Her abundant Love and Grace I was a step closer to my dream. No words can describe what I got

from Her! I am ever so grateful to Her for taking care of me.

***Did the Mother give you any guidance or advice in connection with your work?***

Yes, the Mother guided me in person when I could meet Her, that is till my graduation. After that I had to depend on what She had told me earlier. I tried to understand whatever I had heard during Her classes or what I had read from Sri Aurobindo's books and Hers. I was also in constant touch with Nirod-da and Madhav Pandit.

The duration of the M.B.B.S. course was five and a half years with university examinations conducted at scheduled intervals. Our medical college was affiliated to the University of Madras. I used to write to the Mother seeking Her Blessings to do my best in the examinations and to travel to Madras where the exams were held. She used to write "bénédictions" and send back my letters. This continued till I completed the course.

After the convocation ceremony in Madras I was fortunate to have Her Darshan. I had taken my graduation photograph on which She signed. She gave me a special Blessing Packet with Her painting "Ascent to Truth". She held my hands and told me, "Tu dois devenir un grand médecin" ("You must become a great doctor"). At that age I interpreted this to mean that I should reach the highest position in my profession.

I decided to do my postgraduate studies in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. I sought Her Blessings and I applied to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) New Delhi and the Delhi University. The Mother always showered Her Grace and I got selected at both institutions. As advised by my father and some of my teachers, I joined the AIIMS. After that the contact with Her was no more personal. I always felt Her Presence in my heart. I passed in December 1971





and at the behest of my teachers came back to my Alma Mater, JIPMER. I felt very proud that I was immediately offered the post of senior resident. But what made me immensely happy was that I was back in Pondicherry.

I worked as senior resident for 3 years with the hope of joining as a faculty member. The duties were fourfold: 1) Patient care, 2) Teaching students both undergraduate and postgraduate, 3) Research, 4) Administration.

I got an ad hoc post of Lecturer. For 3 years, year after year, I used to go to Delhi for interview, and find that someone with “pull and push” would get selected. In fact a well-wisher connected with the Ashram offered to use some influence in Delhi, but I declined. After all wasn’t the Mother taking care of me? Ultimately when I did get selected I had to shift to Delhi for a short while. The Mother was working for me, because when I came to Pondicherry for vacation, the Director asked me to rejoin JIPMER, and he took charge of all the formalities with the Ministry of Health in Delhi. I became junior in service to some colleagues. I then used to wonder at what the Mother had meant when She had blessed me to become “un grand médecin”! But then a voice, a sweet voice within me, said, “Continue to do earnestly, remembering all the attributes of a good doctor and a medical teacher. The Mother will take care of you”. I considered it as guidance from the Mother. During one of Her classes I recall Her telling us that we should do our work as sincerely as possible and that the Divine would give us what we needed. After all, who else can know your needs better? I prayed that She should be with me all the while, whether I saw a patient, performed an operation or took a class for my students. Subsequently I was promoted to Assistant Professor and after 3 years to Associate professor. Promotions to Professor, and Director-Professor followed. But that was much later.

By the Mother’s Grace, right from the beginning I enjoyed working. I also had an opportunity to join the faculty of The National Teacher Training Center for Health Professionals established by the World Health Organisation in JIPMER. In this connection I spent one semester at the University

of Sydney, Australia for further training in medical education. It is truly said that when it rains, it pours. The Mother ultimately gave me all that I had aspired for and much more! I was invited as consultant by several national and international organisations including the World Bank (for their projects in India). What more could I ask from Her? She has given me so much more than what I had ever dreamt of.

I remember whenever I operated on an Ashram patient, Dyuman-bhai used to send two Blessing-packets: one for the patient and one for me! When I used to advise surgery for some Ashram patients they used to refuse saying that the Mother did not like surgery. I used to feel bad that though the means to alleviate their physical suffering was there I could not help them. This used to bother me and I used to seek help from Nirod-da or Madhav Pandit to overcome the conflict in me.



The special Blessing-packet the Mother had given me when I graduated used to be with me at all times and I considered it as Her guidance.

**At what age did you leave the Ashram School and was it very difficult to adjust to another school?**

I left the Ashram School at the age of 18 years. Surely, I had some adjustment problems, because of factors both in the Lycée and the Ashram. However, the Mother’s help came in a number of ways.



Firstly, in the Lycée the atmosphere was so very different from the atmosphere in the Ashram (it has been highlighted by some former students in the GC). I was pretty scared as the “provisieur” was extremely strict, and so was the “surveillant général”. Secondly, I had joined the course late by a couple of months and needed to study harder than others. The curriculum had history and geography of France which was also terrible because I never liked these subjects even in the Ashram School! French literature was alright, but not the literature of 4 centuries (17th to 20th).

As a student from the Ashram School I was welcomed in the Lycée. The students from the Ashram school were supposed to be very good. I was lucky to have predecessors like Arunkant Patel and Praveen Nagda, who had left an indelible mark of their academic brilliance! It was a challenge for me to keep up the reputation, and I could only try! Both students and the staff were good to me. The ‘surveillant général’ was kind enough and organised extra French classes for me.

I have recounted the Mother’s response to my leaving the Ashram School. Once the news went round in the Ashram, I found that many people were upset. They used to say, “How did the Mother allow you to leave the Ashram School?” They could not digest the fact that I was continuing to stay in Dortoir. The whole thing was made to sound pretty sacrilegious! Overnight many teachers, captains and others stopped talking to me. I was not given permission to use any facilities as I had nothing more to do with the Ashram.

I was upset and told my father who said, “Learn to appreciate what you are getting spiritually and forget the rest.” This has always stayed with me, and has helped me tremendously.

With the Mother’s Grace I stayed on in Dortoir till I completed my Bac. Aruna Pandya, then in charge, took great care of me. The timings of Lycée were different from those of the Ashram School, and she used put food aside for me. I also had her shoulders to cry on!

To my great happiness a number of teachers were very encouraging and offered help. I was grateful to Nirod-da for his support. One day in the Tennis-ground he told me that there was good and bad “inside and outside”, and it was up to me to use my discretion. He used to call me “budding doctor” and when I graduated he called me “blooming doctor”. Bharati-di (a close friend of the Mother) was my French teacher when I left the Ashram School. Seeing me occasionally in tears she would tell me “The Mother is not only within the four walls of the Ashram. She is everywhere. Learn to feel Her Presence within”. Such assurance saw me through my days in the Lycée.

**Have you ever had the feeling that the work you were doing has a spiritual side to it? If so can you tell us a little more about it?**

My work definitely has a spiritual side! In fact I think every profession/duty has a spiritual side for the individual carrying out his work. This is all the more true in medicine where we deal with human life, and more so in Obstetrics where we deal with two lives, the mother and her baby. Till the seventies we had to depend on our “brain and hands” and at the most an X-ray. We made decisions with such incomplete information and therefore had to depend on the “Hand” above to guide us! I have to accept that I made decisions, so to say, intuitively, but I know it was the Divine Hand that guided me.

Today surgery is so much safer than what it was some decades ago, but a small risk of complications and death cannot be ruled out. Therefore I used to pray as I washed up before the operation and tried to share the idea with my students.

In the field of medicine we never work alone. We always work in a team which requires us to



give up our “EGO” in the interest of the patient! In the last few years efforts have been made to improve patient care based on results of scientific research. Thus emerged ideas of “evidence-based medicine”, “standard management protocols” and “second opinion” that require attitudinal changes among the health professionals. Many doctors feel threatened that they will lose their independence. But we need to give up the idea of “I am the great one”!

Thus there are many occasions, not only in patient care, but also while moving towards ‘student-centered’ curriculum and management of human resources where we need to curb our ego. If we want effective health care there is no other way than to give up our ego and work in harmony.

Despite all the advances in the field of medicine there will continue to be setbacks that can humble us.

Centuries ago, Ambroise Pare, a French surgeon realized this fact when he dressed the wounds of soldiers during the Crimean war, and said “Je panse, Dieu guérit”.

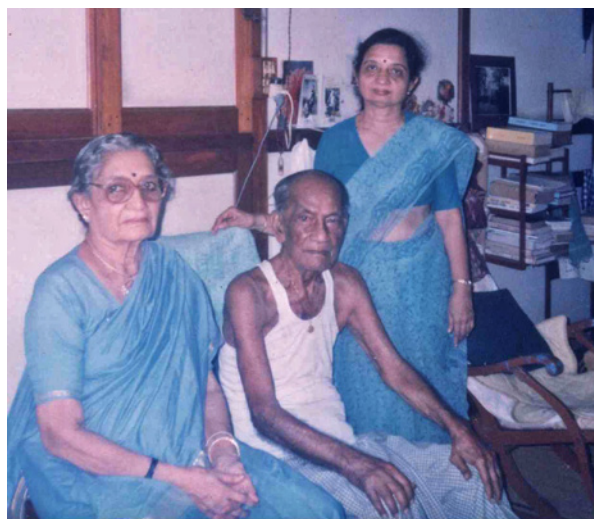
***How did the background of the Ashram help you in your work?***

My Ashram background has been the “backbone” that has supported me throughout my career. Attitude, work culture, discipline, punctuality (much to the dismay of my students and staff), and above all humility...

As we climb up the echelons in our profession we are supposed to become “powerful”, but my prayer was that it should never be misused and harm the patients, students or colleagues. First and foremost they need to be treated with sympathy (empathy is a better term though).

I tried, like in the Ashram School, to focus more on self-learning than “teaching”. On several occasions, I had the opportunity to develop a scheme for “internal evaluation”, to assess the students’ progress throughout the course. Some students were happy, but not many faculty members co-operated. Like it is said, “In India we find a problem to every solution.”

As a faculty member of the National Training Center for Health Professionals, I had the



privilege of bringing the participants of the “Medical Education Workshop” to show them how our school helps students in self-learning.

The physical education I received in the Ashram School certainly gave me a lot of stamina. I realized its importance in education and for good health!

I had learnt in the Ashram about dignity of labour and it has helped me not only in my profession, but also in life. In this regard I have also been very strongly influenced by my father.

***Have you ever used any form of alternative medicine to help your patients?***

I have never used any alternative medicine to help my patients for the simple reason that I am not trained in that field. I believe the Mother had Blessed me to practice allopathy. Once a diagnosis is made, I offer available options in allopathy, surgery being the last. If patients want to try any alternate therapy they are welcome to consult the concerned physician.

However, I was engaged in conducting trials of some Ayurvedic drugs, like we do for allopathic medicine, under the Indian Council for Medical Research, New Delhi.

***You have had a very long career as a doctor. What changes have you had to deal with?***

I retired after a career spanning more than three decades, 1969 to 2001. The advent of technology around the mid-seventies in JIPMER brought about phenomenal changes! There was also a new wave in the concept of patient management, medical education not withstanding

societal changes. The changes I had to deal with were many and in several spheres.

From 1980 onwards, I saw a boom in the availability of diagnostic aids in the form of ultrasound, endoscopes, CT scan, MRI scan and PET scans and robotics... Availability of sophisticated tests for endocrinology and genetics revolutionized management in general and women’s health in particular. An unimaginable range of new drugs/medicines arrived on the scene.

This meant need for training of doctors, in the institution or outside, to handle the equipment available to us. Improvement in diagnosis meant improved patient care.

In order to ensure judicious use of this equipment, workshops were organized in JIPMER or elsewhere. We also conducted workshops to train doctors in the appropriate use of drugs/medicines, to practise medicine ethically so that patients got the maximum benefit. Efforts are continuously made through research and training to help doctors use all these advances rationally and to the benefit of the patients. The success of this training continues to be questionable for a number of reasons.

The patient characteristics also changed. They were gradually being influenced by the availability of “Hi-Tech” and believed that nothing should ever go wrong. But the nicer aspect is that they are mostly educated and participate in their own/family’s healthcare.

As the practice of medicine advanced so did the litigations against doctors. This has greatly changed the medical practice to a defensive one. It is a sad state of affairs that the “patient-doctor trust” is lost! During the training of doctors, we had to take care of this aspect and teach them that whenever they made a decision it had to stand the test in a court of law!

I had to deal with the changing attitude of students, who over the years were losing interest in learning basic clinical skills like taking history, physical examination, arriving at clinical diagnosis and counselling. In an effort to further strengthen clinical skills and attitude, I published two books, along with my colleagues.

Over the years the work culture changed

among the staff in all categories as compared to earlier years. It was a relentless battle to ensure that patient care did not suffer.

***Is there anything else that you would like to share?***

Working in a government set up has its own ups and downs. However it was very satisfying to treat women from poor backgrounds. They have their own way of expressing their gratitude. I would like to share with you an incident which is deeply etched in my memory. For a couple of years I worked in the JIPMER unit at the Maternity Hospital in town. An extremely poor woman consulted me for a complication following childbirth, shunned by her family and neighbours because she had totally lost control over her bladder. I operated on her and gave her a saree to go home in as she had no clothes. After 5 years she went to the Maternity Hospital and didn’t find me there. Then she somehow managed to get hold of me in JIPMER (not an easy task) and said, “Please come with me for a cup of coffee”! That was the tastiest coffee I have ever had.

Often the “downs” were there more than “ups” because in JIPMER we treated a huge number of patients. At times resources, both material and human were scarce. In addition the hierarchy was very strong and made working conditions at times very difficult. There were times I lost my temper and must have sounded harsh. I could not then keep up the “traditional” demands that a doctor should be “soft like butter, soothing like treacle, sweet like sugar and jolly like jam...” as told by Sri Aurobindo to Nirod-da in his correspondence.

I am so very grateful to the Mother for having given me such wonderful parents and loving siblings who supported me during my stressful days. The Mother saw to it that I had a few like-minded colleagues in the department. In addition, my father suggested I restart learning vocal music, my second love.

I am narrating after so many years how the Mother helped me to achieve my dream of becoming a doctor! She Blessed me to feel Her Presence within, all through my learning and working days! ❧



# I CARRY THE ASHRAM WITHIN MYSELF

*Purnima Sethia '77 on her life as a doctor and a seeker*

## **How did you get interested in the medical field?**

Since the age of 10-12, I had a burning desire to understand, to discover how the human body functions. The best way to do so was to study medicine. When I was twelve years old, on my birthday, Tanmaya-da, my teacher, helped me project forward in life.

He asked me: "What do you want to do when you grow up?"

I replied: "I want to know and understand the functioning of a human body."

"How can you do that?"

"By becoming a doctor." I said.

"After that what do you want to do?"

I replied: "I want to work for society, for humanity."

"How can you do that?"

"I want to work for WHO (World Health Organisation)." This was the best I could think of at that age.

"After that what do you want to do?"

"I want to return to the Ashram life." I replied.

I did not know at that time, but when I think of it now I can see that I was setting some milestones in my life. I was setting up some *sankalpas*.

## **What was your journey after you left the Ashram School?**

I did not want to leave the Ashram School before completing Knowledge. I needed those three years to develop my maturity.

Our Ashram education was not recognised for entering a medical college. I had to either pass the +2 exams or take a BSc exam from a recognised institution. I joined a govt. college in Hyderabad to complete the +2 program (did the 2 years program in one year), then took the medical entrance exam to join a medical college.

I completed the MBBS (Bachelor in Medicine and Bachelor in Surgery) course in JIPMER, Pondicherry, then went on to do an MD in Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the Université René Descartes, Paris V.

I would like to share some thoughts I had noted regarding this period of my life. This was done as part of a project work in 2012 (*see box on facing page*).

## **Which part of medical studies did you find the hardest and which was the easiest?**

The toughest part of the studies was the switch from the Ashram School to taking the +2 exams. To learn all the compulsory subjects in detail, memorise them and reproduce them in a given time, knowing that I had to succeed.



The medical studies were intensive throughout. We had one and half hours of dissection every day for one and a half years. We touched

## **PREPARATION (RE-ADMISSION TO COLLEGE)**

My curiosity to understand the functioning of a human body, to become a doctor, made me leave the Ashram. I did not have a baccalaureate degree to enter a medical college. Entry into a medical college was very difficult in India. You needed to have a minimum of 95-99% marks in the higher secondary (baccalaureate) exams in the following subjects: physics, chemistry, botany and zoology. In the Ashram school I had completed this level but had no marks. I had not studied botany and zoology and had never written an official public exam.

I joined a college in Hyderabad and studied the 2nd year's program. The same teachers would come home to teach me the first year's program.

My day would start at 7:00 am with a first tuition at home. Then from 9:30 to 5:00 I would go to the college. From 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm I would have two tuitions at home. From 9:00 pm onwards the friend with whom I was living would train me to write exams. Then we would lie down in our beds and she would help me learn my lessons by a series of questions and answers. We would go on till I dropped off to sleep.

My only free time was between 5:00 and 5:45 pm when I would walk back from the college and stop on the way to eat a snack (bhajji).

This was my routine for 11 months.. I cleared my exams with distinction and a state rank and got admission in a medical college.

*Reflection: Determination, one pointed focus*

and turned in all directions all the bones of the human body. The nights were spent studying for exams; months of non-stop studies (with 4-5 hours of sleep per day) before the final exams....

## **How did you inwardly prepare for this step you had taken?**

Determination, one-pointed focus. I was leaving behind what I loved the most, the Ashram School, the Ashram life, in order to pursue

*on a Sankalpa, an objective.*

## **REALISATION OF AN OBJECTIVE (MBBS)**

It took me another 5 ½ years of intensive studies to reach my target to become a doctor.

## **FURTHER PURSUIT (MD OBSTETRICS & GYNAECOLOGY)**

I wanted to complete my studies with a specialisation in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. At the same time I wanted to discover a new country, a new culture. I decided to come to France.

The first year was a year of shock. I did not speak French well. I had to learn to live alone, to absorb all the cultural differences, to do my own house chores, to think for myself, to take decisions on my own. In the hospitals, everyone would just trample over me emotionally, overrule my presence because I was not asserting myself. I was timid. I would cry every single day.

Slowly I accepted the game and developed my ego. It was smooth sailing after that. I had learnt to work hard in India, and now most of my time and energy was dedicated to the hospital.

I spent a lot of my time in the hospitals, at the patients' bedside. Each patient was like a new page in a book. I learnt a lot about life, illnesses, fears, hope, joy, dreams from them.

Apart from the Obstetrics and Gynaecology departments, I worked as a nurse for the first two years in the departments of Palliative care, AIDS and handicapped children.

*(Extract from a project work done in 2012)*

my aim: "to understand the functioning of the physical body". I had to succeed.

Leaving the Ashram made me even more responsible. I represent the Ashram School and the Ashram in the outside world. The feeling "I am HER CHILD" has never left me.

## **What is the kind of work you are doing now?**

♦ I worked as a doctor in Obstetrics and Gynaecology in France.



## THE SECOND MILESTONE

(2nd Objective laid down at the age of 12)

Later I returned to India for four years with my family. I was looking forward to getting back to doing a course in Yoga. I landed up working with WHO as a project manager in clinical trials on vaccines for children.

I worked in the four corners of India: Delhi (North), Chennai and Vellore (South), Calcutta (East) and Pune (West). There was a lot of

interaction with the children in the slum areas of the four major cities, the Ministry of Health, the medical research teams and the virology laboratory.

A look, a smile, a word, a gesture... there were moments when I could feel the heart throb and the breath of this wonderful country. I could feel its deep roots, its simplicity and its great complexity. I grew roots in my own country.

(Extract of a project work done in 2012)

- ♦ Worked as a doctor in Clinical Research in pharmaceutical companies and in International NGOs all over the world.

- ♦ Worked with WHO in Clinical Research in India.

- ♦ Did a teacher training course in Yoga<sup>1</sup> (Bihar School of Yoga)

- ♦ Work as consultant in Clinical Research and teach the techniques of Yoga and meditation.

**When you first started working could you manage to distance yourself from the suffering of the people you treated?**

Yes, I could distance myself from the suffering or the joy of the people I came in touch with. I try to apply the attitude: to be an actor and a spectator “*drashta*” at the same time instead of being drowned in the turbulence of the mind and emotions.

I have faced moments of intense joy, sadness, helplessness.... I try to go beyond these emotions.

**Do you feel that there is a spiritual side to healing people? If so, can you share with us your thoughts?**

About ¾ of the illnesses in the human beings arise from a psychosomatic imbalance. Helping people understand their ever-changing multifaceted personality (influenced by emotions, lower mind, *samskaras*...) through the practice of asanas, pranayama and techniques of concentration, meditation and relaxation could play

an important role in the prevention of illnesses. First one needs to find a harmony between the different parts which constitute oneself. Then one realises that the environment within oneself is in total harmony with the environment outside oneself.

The physical body left to itself without the influence of the vital or the mind is a great instrument with an inborn instinct of its own. It is like a flute where the air within mingles with the air outside producing a harmonious melody.

**How has your background of the Ashram education helped you in your work?**

I would again like to share the ideas I had noted about our education in my project work from 2012 (see box on facing page).

**What do you miss the most from your life in the Ashram?**

Life goes on, one takes a decision to the best of one's capacity at that given moment and accepts the consequences with open arms. One learns to live the present moment to its full.

I miss nothing from my life in the Ashram. I carry the Ashram within myself. I continue to apply the simple principles planted in me as seeds when I was a child.

I hear the bells ring somewhere... I want to return to the Ashram life...(the third milestone set at the age of twelve).

What does it really mean and how best do I prepare myself for it?... My journey continues..... ❧

1. My intention to join this course was to discipline myself, to consciously work towards ‘self perfection’, to rekindle the flame of aspiration and devotion in order to continue on my journey.

## PONDICHERRY - MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO'S INTEGRAL YOGA (6 -19 YEARS)

My childhood was the most ideal upbringing that one can ever think of. It was based on the Mother's application of Hers and Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga in life.

- Mother had developed a set of simple prayers for the children of the Ashram which were my first acquaintance with the benefit of repetition. One of the prayers was:

*“Gloire à Toi, Seigneur, Réalisateur Suprême. Donne-nous une foi ardente, active, absolue, inébranlable en Ta VICTOIRE.”*

“Seigneur” can be interpreted as per the reader's beliefs; as the macrocosm, as Nature, as the Creator....

- i) Faith and trust in the Guru, the guide, the light, the divine grace and

- ii) The conviction that man has to aspire to find his true self within and then to unite with the macrocosm.

These two fundamental principles were then planted in me.

- I have studied in order to acquire knowledge. We had no system of exams, no fixed program of studies. I chose my subjects.

*“Apprendre pour savoir, étudier pour connaître les secrets de la Nature et de la vie, s'éduquer pour faire croître sa conscience, se discipliner pour devenir maître de soi, pour surmonter ses faiblesses, ses incapacités et ses ignorances, se préparer à avancer dans la vie vers un but plus noble, plus vaste, plus généreux et plus vrai....”* and

*“DÉCLARATION*

*(à répéter chaque jour par tous les élèves)*

*Ce n'est pas pour notre famille, ce n'est pas pour avoir une situation, ce n'est pas pour gagner de l'argent, ce n'est pas pour obtenir un diplôme, que nous étudions.*

*Nous étudions pour apprendre, pour savoir, pour comprendre le monde et pour la joie que cela nous donne.”*

- Physical education with competitions was part of our daily curriculum. Regularity,

endurance, discipline were part of our daily program. I learned to clap my hands sincerely when my friend won the competition and I had lost.

- Extra curricular activities included all one can imagine. The choice was the student's. He chose that which helped him develop his best.

- There was a discipline - the hours were fixed. I could not take extra holidays and go out of Pondicherry to attend my sister's wedding etc.... Yet all was like a big game, full of joy. Nothing was imposed. I had no special period for meditation or prayer or sadhana. We were inspired to apply the principles of an ‘ideal child’ twenty four hours of the day.

- Throughout this period I applied the following two principles in my life:

- 1) *“Douce Mère, Permets que nous soyons dès maintenant et pour toujours simplement Tes petits enfants.”*

- 2) For any action, any decision, any thoughts or feelings, my common barometer was:

*“If Mother was standing in front of me — would I think, act or feel the same way?”*

If the answer was:

YES — then I would go ahead.

NO — then I would try and find an alternative solution.

Reflection: Looking back now, a bell rings: as a child, this is trying to take a *sattwic* attitude in all that we undertake.

As stated by the Yoga Vashishtha (the story of Rama and his father Dasharatha) the “association with *sattwa*” and the “divine grace” are the two pillars required to follow the path of self-realization.

With time and experience, I have understood that our Ashram background has given us naturally the strongest foundations for these two pillars. This attitude and the divine grace have certainly helped me a lot in my work

(Extract from a project work done in 2012)

All quotes are from the Mother.



# MY MIND WAS MADE UP

*Smita Mehta '75H tells us how she became a doctor*

## **How did you get the desire to be a doctor?**

As a child, I recall always playing with the toy 'doctor sets'. I was always interested in the tools and this turned into a fascination. I would go to my friend Kanishtha's house to play, and there we were surrounded by doctors. It is there that I saw a real stethoscope and a white apron, which planted in me the idea of actually becoming a doctor myself.

As I grew older, the idea of helping others and alleviating their pain was extremely appealing. I was sure I wanted to be a doctor. My mind was made up.

## **What did the Mother say when you informed Her of your decision?**

I never actually asked the Mother for approval. I simply sought Her blessings once I had made up my mind.

When I was 12, I made a passing comment to Guru Prasad (Goupi) about my ambition of becoming a doctor. He got the ball rolling, informing Tanmaya-da, who in turn told Kirit-bhai. They both helped me contact the Lycée and ensured that I had a smooth transition there. Kake was also instrumental in this process; he taught me advanced math, which really helped me in my future studies.

## **What was the reaction of your family?**

Initially my mother was a little reluctant and apprehensive, but then she was a source of encouragement once she realised my true passion for medicine. My father was supportive from day one. My brothers were very excited and aided me during my studies, by offering to test my knowledge and even giving me the breaks I required.

## **Did you continue to keep the Mother informed of your progress?**

Not really, but I always felt Her aura with me.

## **How difficult was it for you to adapt to a**

## **new school?**

The first day at the Lycée was a total cultural shock for me. The whole structure was very formal; something I was not used to. Standing in a queue and entering the classroom in pin drop silence was something I was not used to.

However, the professors at Lycée were extremely nice to me and helped me adapt to this new environment.

A month after studying at the Lycée, I casually visited Vers La Perfection section in the school. Swadesh-da asked me "You're back?" At that point I was tempted to return to the Ashram School, but something held me back and I replied with tears in my eyes "No, I have just come to visit you all."

## **Was it hard for you to see your 3 brothers going to the Ashram School and you were**

## **not part of those activities anymore?**

Initially, I really missed the carefree and friendly environment at the Ashram School. Watching my brothers leave for Group as well as listening to their stories about the happenings in the school did of course make me nostalgic. But I looked at their presence in the Ashram School as a positive thing, and it was my way of keeping in touch with the school and everyone there who made it so special.

## **How long did you actually work as a doctor?**

When I married Akshay, I realised that it would be very difficult to pursue a postgraduate course and have a full-fledged career in medicine. I worked as a doctor for a year and a half in a private charitable hospital.

## **Any unforgettable episodes of that time?**

I worked in the paediatrics department in the Jain Clinic, where I was able to serve a lot of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This



was particularly rewarding.

Later, I was asked to help during the setting up of the dispensary of our factory in Surat. My medical knowledge has always come to good use.

## **Did you feel that there was a spiritual side to healing others?**

Yes, for sure. Faith and positive energies from both the patient and the doctor are crucial in the healing process. Even in our Ashram Nursing Home, we always read the Mother's message "Finally it is Faith that cures".

## **Could you detach yourself from other people's suffering?**

This is part and parcel of becoming a doctor. Of course, initially it was a struggle, but I focused my energy on alleviating their pain and dealing with the situation at hand.

## **How did your Ashram background help you in your work?**

Qualities such as sincerity, truthfulness, and simplicity were instilled in me by the Ashram School and I have always been guided by these values.

## **Anything else that you would like to add?**

The Divine Mother has always protected me and guided me at every step of my life. ❧

# IT WAS AN OBVIOUS CHOICE

*Sujay Iyer '08H about taking up medicine*

## **How did you get interested in medicine?**

My father is a doctor and my mother worked in the administration. So naturally, medicine intrigued me and a general interest developed. Disliking mathematics undergirded the interest and MBBS became a very real career choice.

It was an obvious choice. It's a profession that helps people. And there is absolutely no monotony involved in it, which is great considering a lot of my friends are stuck in banal jobs with no room for innovation and creativity.

## **Where did you study after leaving SAICE?**

I left SAICE when I was in E.A.V.P. 3, joined Petit Séminaire in 9th grade and shifted to DAV Bilaspur because my parents got transferred.

I took the PMT examination and got selected after dropping a year at Kasturba Medical College, Manipal University, Mangalore.

I did my internship from Sir Gangaram Hospital, New Delhi and currently work as Emergency Registrar at Apollo Hospital, Bilaspur.

## **How easy or difficult was it to study outside**

## **after leaving SAICE?**

It was hard, yes. The language orientation in mathematics and sciences was particularly difficult. I started taking special tuitions. So that made it relatively easier. But in the beginning, it was a bit of a struggle because the courses were dissimilar as well.

## **Is there any memorable case that you can share with us?**

I would love to. But there is a confidentiality clause that I've signed, so I'd rather not.

## **How has your SAICE background helped you in your profession?**

I am a well-read, polished, cultured, engaging person because of SAICE and its education. It helped me build a decent personality which is impressive in the hospital. Patients trust me more, attendants interact with

me and it gives me confidence to see their faith while treating the illness.

## **What do you miss of the life in the Ashram?**

Everything. The library, sports, the informal discussions with teachers, the camaraderie, the music and plays, the spirituality... everything. ❧





# PRACTISING EXCELLENCE

**Bhrata Reddy '83** is currently the Director of Critical Care Services and Cardiovascular Services at the Kingman Regional Medical Centre in Arizona, USA. The Cardiovascular Centre includes the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit (CVICU) for open heart surgery patients, Progressive Care Unit (PCU), and the Cardiac Cath Lab and ECHO (Echocardiography) Department. We spoke to him about his training and his work. (Some answers have been sourced from an earlier interview that The Golden Chain did with him.)

**After Knowledge you were an inmate of the Ashram for quite some time. What made you leave?**

I left Pondy in December '92 and went to the U.S., not for a visit but to study. Actually I wanted to study physiotherapy but unfortunately got some misinformation from the U.S. Since Biology and Chemistry were my subjects I thought I could study something in that line.

That was when my cousin suggested that I study nursing. It was possible, I was told, to study for two years (for an associate degree) and then take the national Board Exam to be licensed to practice. I thought this would enable me to start working, gain experience and pay off my tuition loans. It is the same Board Exam whether one takes it at the end of 4 years (with a Bachelor's degree) or two years, which I opted to do.

**What made you choose the U.S.?**

I chose the U.S. because it has the best advanced courses. Europe is good for visiting but the U.S. is good for studies and stay.

**What were the skills you had to learn once you were outside the Ashram?**

Whether we are aware of them or not we are quite well equipped in terms of skills by the time

we graduate from Knowledge. In fact I would go as far as to say that our students are better able to perform and cope with the stresses that are prevalent outside the Ashram than the average student who grows up outside the Ashram. The level of exposure we have in the Ashram to cultures, languages, physical education and every facet of life is amazing! Apart from a few aspects of dealing with situations such as taking someone's word about something as opposed to getting it in writing, I really did not feel any major lack of skills. In fact I felt much better equipped than a lot of my classmates and people around me.

**How long did you have to study for being a Nurse Practitioner?**

As I mentioned earlier, I took an associate course of two years and took the Board Exam. Then I studied for two years in order to get a Bachelor's degree. At that time I used to work in the nights full time and attend classes during the day more than full time. A full course load per semester for a full time student is 12 credits. I used to always take between 16 and 21 credits. I used to work in a Cardiac Intensive Care Unit. After getting my degree I continued working for one summer, while deciding whether to do Medicine or something



else. Being a foreign student, financing was a major problem. The other aspect I did not like about doing Medicine was that once one does that one is stuck in more than one way into one track. The debts are so high that you have to work in that line for a while to pay them off... time and money invested make it difficult to change tracks. Finally I decided to take three Masters courses, an F.N.P. (Family Nurse Practitioner) which is a clinical tract with residency and all that, a Nurse Executive Masters which is geared for health care management and an MBA (Masters in Business Administration). I did all three masters together at the same time and took more than a full course load for each of them. When I joined all these masters I changed to working half time at night. I studied at Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama. It was quite expensive but the education was better and the university is listed in the top ten buys for education.

**What is the difference between an N.P. (Nurse Practitioner) and an R.N. (Registered Nurse)?**

A Registered Nurse cannot prescribe or formulate a medical diagnosis, he/she can only formulate a nursing diagnosis. A Nurse Practitioner can diagnose, prescribe and treat. The strengths of this profession is a wider scope of practice and a more regulated life, time-wise. But a Nurse Practitioner gets paid much less than a doctor and the laws pertaining to a Nurse Practitioner vary to some extent from state to state. They are beginning to recognize the potential of nurse practitioners more and more and so the laws are beginning to give us more autonomy. The insurance companies too are beginning to reimburse us better, but it's a slow process with the usual politics and special interest lobbies involved. On the East Coast and Oregon etc., we can engage in private practice, other states have different rules for practice.

**What are the radical changes that came about in your life when compared to your earlier life in Pondy?**

I had no problem in adapting to that life-style. I had no culture shocks and no food problems. I had a lot of American friends who were very



good and helpful. But the lifestyle during the years spent in studies and work was atrocious over there — no routine for food or sleep — very different from the stable Ashram life. I used to have very often just one meal and a snack a day. If I got 4 hours of sleep that was a good day. Physical Education here was responsible for my being able to take all that amount of strain. We do have a good tolerance for stress.

**Have you ever felt that healing has a spiritual aspect to it?**

Without any doubt! The Mother has said so much about it. I don't think it is necessary to repeat here what She has said about this subject.

**How has your background of the Ashram helped you in your professional life?**

As I mentioned just now we are in many ways better prepared to cope with the ways of the world than a lot of people from outside the Ashram. The attitude with which we do things is very important to us here in the Ashram. People can perceive and experience that attitude clearly in our work everywhere. They appreciate it immensely. We are sincere, empathize and care genuinely and are taught and practise humility to a greater degree, in a world that teaches people to boast about what they have achieved and encourages them to embellish and market the mediocre. Because of the way we are taught in the Ashram we are better





These are the strengths of our medical team. But in a good system even though help should be available there should be more people to alleviate stress.

Today the stress is not decentralized. It is the same group of people who are bearing the stress all the time. Secondly, there should be stronger supportive links between the alternative therapies. Maybe the future will bring more cross-referencing between the therapies. With cooperation, patients benefit most. I think we have a good

able to think on our feet, handle stress, logically analyze and present things to a varied audience. In general we are more well-rounded given our multifaceted exposure to things both physical and mental in nature. All of this of course gets noticed and helps us in our professional lives.

**Away from the Ashram do you find it difficult to follow in day to day life what the Mother and Sri Aurobindo taught us?**

Outside, much more effort is needed to follow their teachings. Here we have a steady state of support from Them, which we don't even realise. There the atmosphere has to be recreated. Here even when we are not making a conscious effort, a visit to the Ashram and the Samadhi sets you back on track. There, a self-discipline is needed to put you back on track. I think all students should go out once to know and appreciate what we get here so easily.

**When you look at the Ashram medical-team, what is your opinion about it? What do you feel are its strengths and weaknesses?**

The Ashram is a very good community. We have excellent doctors. The medical team has high commitment and high potential. Before there was only Nripen-da but now there are quite a few doctors. There is a wide variety of alternative therapies and the necessary potential for a sound infrastructure.

response time but like all things it too I am sure will improve with time and better planning. As I said, we certainly have very capable minds involved in all these aspects of health care.

Dr. Datta is always trying to make better use of present resources and new technology. He is always concerned with the improvement of our health care system.

And I should also add that the Ashram has the best elder care programme.

**You have received a lot of appreciation for your work. Do tell us about it.**

I have been fortunate thus far in building and maintaining an excellent reputation in the healthcare management field in the USA. Hospitals that I have worked with have recognized and appreciated my work. One hospital nominated me as their best director and gave me box tickets to the Spurs (basketball team) games. The Spurs at the time were the top team in the USA. Others presented trophies etc. In 2012 I received a Living Legacy Award. Here is what the newspaper said:

*Reddy Bhrata of Kingman received a Living Legacy award from Samford University's Ida V. Moffett School of Nursing during its 90th anniversary gala on Oct. 13. Bhrata was among 50 honorees selected "for the impact they have had on the mental, physical and spiritual well-being of others," said nursing Dean Nena F. Sanders, adding that they have*

*perpetuated a legacy of academic excellence, caring, compassion and service around the world in order to make a significant impact on humanity.*

Earlier this year my cardiovascular service line was recognized as among the best in the Southwest United States. That says a lot when you think about the fact that mine is a stand-alone community hospital in a small town with Las Vegas and Phoenix (both big cities) right next door with their huge hospital systems and resources. Being better than these richer, bigger and often more prestigious hospitals and organizations is a real feather in my team's cap.

**What other kind of appreciation have you received?**

I was given balcony seats to the River Parade during the fiesta, a very popular event that brings in more than a million tourists.

What continues to touch me the most is

appreciation from staff and patients. People show their appreciation in many ways. One nurse's aide from Ethiopia felt so grateful that she presented me with a set of their traditional robes. Other nurses and staff presented me with a best manager trophy they specially got made for me. As far back as when I first got an apartment when I was still studying the staff was very fond of me and took special care of me. I still have many of their gifts. They mean a lot to me. I have experienced sincere appreciation wherever I have gone. Some things I will never forget such as when an African-American family sent me an expensive box of chocolates and wrote to me from across the country to tell me they were so grateful that their father passed away under my care. I get a lot of appreciation and "thank you"s for helping people get well or saving people's lives but instances like this one are special. ❧

## WE TREAT, SHE HEALS.

*Hemang '79H answers*

**How did you get interested in healing people?**

As far as I can remember, since I was quite young, somewhere inside I felt that this is what I have to do. It was more of a calling rather than an informed decision.

**Does homeopathy have a strong following in Mumbai?**

Yes it does.

**Do you use any other forms of medical treatment along with homeopathy?**

Yes, I have allopathic training also and practise family medicine.

**What was the most difficult part of the preparation before you started practising?**

I realized that practising medicine was not just about diagnosing diseases and giving drugs. There was so much more to do in the process of treating a

patient. Foremost is being compassionate which often consists of hearing them out and allaying their fears. Most often, half the battle is won there itself. Winning their faith is a long journey. It's been thirty years and I am still learning.

**Do you find it difficult to detach yourself from other people's suffering?**

In the beginning, yes, I used to carry the baggage home. Then gradually I learnt that it does not help the patients and being objective is more beneficial to them. You must have heard that by and large doctors do not treat their own family members, especially during serious illness, surgery or a heart attack and refer them to their

colleagues who are more objective and do not let emotions cloud their judgement.



***Have you ever felt that there is a spiritual dimension to healing?***

Yes I believe there is a spiritual dimension to healing and the essential ingredients are faith and prayers. Homeopathy acts on realms which are beyond the physical and acts on the vital force of the individual. It recognizes that no two individuals are alike and even if their maladies are the same, the remedy would be different. The Homeopathic medicines are potentized by a process of dilution in such a way that beyond a certain point, the higher potencies of the medicines have no trace of the original substance on chemical analysis, and yet the best of results have been obtained. Modern medicine has trashed this as a placebo effect.

I have come across patients who would come with complaints so diverse that they did not fit a disease picture. No amount of medicines would afford any relief. Out of frustration they would go to these people called Baba(s) who would give them water charged with prayers (they chant and then exhale on the water). The next day they would come hale and hearty saying the water helped. Such incidents have taken place several times in the last few years. So we can conclude that there are many dimensions to healing.

***How has your background of an upbringing in the Ashram helped you in your work?***

Deep within, I think, consciously and subconsciously, I have tried to live my life according to the values and standards I imbibed from my Ashram education and have tried to apply them

across the board — be it in the personal, social or professional sphere.

***Can you share with us any memorable case in all these years of practice?***

There must have been many, but the one I remember is of a patient who was nearly misdiagnosed as having abdominal colic whereas it turned out to be an ectopic pregnancy. When I saw her she was sinking. Her fallopian tube had burst and she was bleeding internally. The task then was to get her into a hospital and arrange for a surgeon. Their apartment was on the 12th floor. To cut it short, with good coordination the surgeon was standing by prepared, additional blood was arranged for transfusion and all went well. To crown it all she had another baby the next year.

***Anything else you want to share with us?***

This is very personal, and I have suffered this quandary since the age of fourteen. As all of you would know, at that age one has to decide whether one wants to continue education in the Ashram or go out and study. I chose the latter. Before actually coming to the decision I wrote to the Mother that I wanted to become a doctor, adding “Should I leave the school and go out?” and within brackets I wrote, “Please let me go.” Mother answered, “Do as you want to.” I still ask myself, was this a lack of faith in the Divine that I could not let Her decide what was good for me?

Those of you who have chosen and lived all your lives in the Ashram, if you have something to say, please do so. ❧

**DIVINE FORCE IN HEALING**

**Nirod-da:** Can we help a patient by aspiring for him? Since the Divine Force is already acting on him, how can my aspiration help him further?

**Sri Aurobindo:** It can. Every little helps.

**Nirod-da:** I am still wondering why there should be doctors and a dispensary at all! Isn't it a paradox — the Divine sending his disciples to the human physician?

**Sri Aurobindo:** Rubbish! This is a world of the play of forces, sir, and the Doctor is a force. So why should not the Divine use him? Have you realised that if the Divine did everything, there would be no world, only a show of marionettes?

February 1935

(From Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo by Nirodbaran)

**SRI AUROBINDO ON HOMEOPATHY**

**Nirod-da:** I quite believe that homeopathy has a place. I've heard from the Mother to that effect and, from other authoritative sources, of some miraculous cures by it.

**Sri Aurobindo:** Dr. Valle himself, who is an allopath and not likely to be bamboozled, has studied homeopathy and uses it in many cases.

**Nirod-da:** I asked Mother about R, and she said that he has a magnetism around him, which he can put into his patients. I have also marked that he has enormous self-confidence and a capacity to create confidence in others.

**Sri Aurobindo:** That is his real strength along with the magnetism and power of suggestion. The man is a tower of vital strength and a dynamo of vital force — but with all the turbidity of a vital force.

**Nirod-da:** ...Anyway, even if his explanations are exasperating, I've learnt something from R — calmness, self-confidence and faith.

**Sri Aurobindo:** Right — that is the thing every physician should have.

November 1935

**Nirod-da:** People will acclaim that allopathy has failed and homeopathy has succeeded. But my point is that Valle, an allopath, would have been as successful as R if he had the backing of your Force.

**Sri Aurobindo:** The Force needs an instrument and an instrumentation also sometimes....

**Nirod-da:** I quote to you an instance of the symptomatic riddle. Some symptoms like headache, vomiting etc. may be caused by many diseases such as brain-tumour, syphilis, blood-pressure and others. If you tell me that a homeopathic medicine for headache and other symptoms will be a panacea for all of them then I am afraid it will be difficult for me to accept it.

**Sri Aurobindo:** Tumour, syphilis, etc. are specialities, but what I have found in my psycho-physical experience is that most disorders of the body are connected, though they

go by families, — but there is also connection between the families. If one can strike at their psycho-physical root, one can cure even without knowing the pathological whole of the matter and working through the symptoms is a possibility. Some medicines invented by demi-mystics have this power. What I am now considering is whether homeopathy has any psycho-physical basis. Was the founder a demi-mystic? I don't understand otherwise certain peculiarities of the way R's medicines act.

December 1935

**Nirod-da:** ...I must say that R's theories about diseases are absurd, however successful he may be as a homeopath-physician.

**Sri Aurobindo:** You may say what you like about the homeopathic theories, but I have seen R work them out detail by detail in cases where he had free and unhampered action and the confidence of the patients and their strict obedience and have seen the results correspond to his statements and his predictions based on them fulfilled not only to the very letter but according to the exact times fixed, not according to R's reports but according to the daily long detailed and precise reports of the allopathic doctor in attendance. After that I refuse to believe, even if all the allopaths in the world shout it in unison, that homeopathic theory or R's interpretation and application of it are mere rubbish and nonsense. As to mistakes, all doctors make mistakes and very bad ones and kill as well as cure — my grandfather and one of my cousins were patently killed by one of the biggest doctors in Bengal. One theory is as good as another and as bad according to the application made of it in any particular case. But it is something else behind that decides the issue.

October 1936

(From Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo by Nirodbaran)



# THERE IS A HEALER WITHIN US

Arvind Babu '63 answers

## How did you start working in the physiotherapy department?

Way back in 1963 my academic career was coming to an end when I was approached by two



departmental heads separately: Amiyo-da, the manager of the Ashram Press and Kalu, head of the Department of Physiotherapy. They wanted that I should join their respective departments. I requested them to put the matter before the Mother and answered them that wherever she decided I would gladly accept.

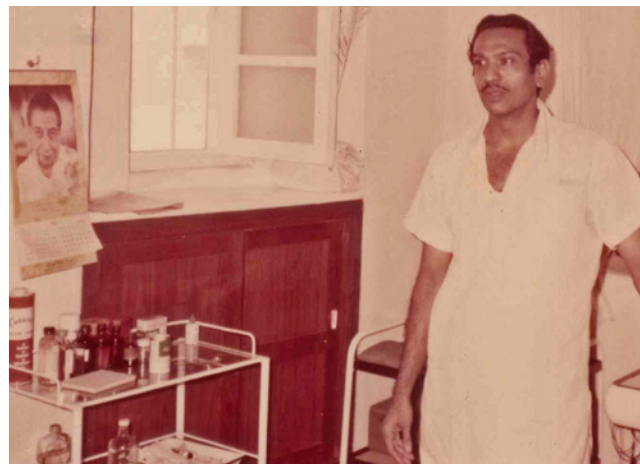
After some days Amrita-da, one of the first members of the Ashram Trust, met me and informed me that the Mother wanted to know where I preferred to work. I said that I had no preference and I would abide by her decision. Three or four days elapsed and Amrita-da caught hold of me in the Ashram courtyard and passed on the message that the Mother had decided that I should work in the Department of Physiotherapy.

## How did you learn your work?

When I started working in the Physiotherapy Department I had very little knowledge of that particular work. I had learned massage from

Birenda, who was our body building and weight-lifting instructor. Every Sunday about eight to ten of us boys assembled in the Tennis Ground early in the morning and Birenda taught us various massage strokes and techniques. We selected our partners and massaged each other.

Work teaches work; it is work that brings experience. Practice gives skill. Gradually, with the expert instruction of my friend Kalu, I began to pick up the various methods of therapy — hydrotherapy, electrotherapy, Swedish massage, the different techniques and systems of massage and therapeutic exercises etc. I also attended Dr. Satyabrata Sen's (Capt. Chitra di's brother) classes on "Sports Injuries" and Dhruva's (an American) Acupuncture courses. Moreover, I began to read articles pertaining to the subject from various magazines and books. From my side, I tried and am still trying my level best to gain as much knowledge as possible and apply it on patients.



## Do you feel that there is a spiritual side to healing?

There is a Healer within us and we have to be more conscious and open to Him so that he can help us remain always inwardly happy and healthy.

## What is the most difficult aspect of this work?

"I", the Mr. Ego, is the most difficult aspect of any work. The ego-shackled mind thinks that it is the sole ruler of our heart, vital and body, but being steeped in darkness and ignorance it misgoverns us.

Our true Ruler is the soul — the seat of the Supreme abiding in the deep recess of our heart. The human body is the dwelling place of various divine powers or godheads. Mind is the home of divine light and knowledge. Heart, that of divine love and compassion. The Vital, that of divine power and strength and the Body, that of divine beauty and delight. In the process of involution, these divine powers lost their true original sheen and turned into their opposite or negative powers. Light into darkness and ignorance, love into hatred and violence, power into weakness and impotence and beauty and delight into ugliness and suffering.

The difficulty in work arises because we are unable to shift our allegiance from our ignorant mind to our soul, which is the seat of all-light, all-love, all-power and all-beauty and delight.

To be free from all injuries, pain and suffering, let us pray to the inner healer.

"Open my mind, my heart, my life to your Light, your Love, your Power.

In all things, may I see the Divine"

— Sri Aurobindo

Can I add a line with the Master's permission? Open my body to your Beauty and Delight.

Yes, only his Grace can keep us healthy, strong and happy. From our side we must try our level best to help Him to do this work unhindered.

## Do you sometimes feel drawn into other people's suffering? And if so how do you distance yourself from it?

Mother had hinted to the following effect that to get drawn into people's suffering drags us away from our sadhana. All problems, all sufferings are the result of our unconsciousness and ignorance. It is the inner guide and healer who can really help us. We could be of some help to others only in so far as we can make them aware of this fact.



## Have you passed on your knowledge to anybody? How difficult is it?

What knowledge can I pass on to others when I am still ignorant and unconscious? All of us have to work upon ourselves and find the inner Guide and Healer, who can show us the true way towards a healthy and happy life. Till we are able to bring harmony and peace in our physical-vital-mental being, we have to pass through the anvil of pain and suffering.

## What kind of advice do you give to people so that they can prevent injuries?

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have said a number of times in their letters, correspondence and writings that all suffering (including injuries and accidents) are the result of our ignorance and unconsciousness. We have to remain ever vigilant and conscious in all the activities of our life, sports, studies, work etc.

## Is there anything else you would like to share?

The Mother encouraged her children to participate in sports activities with a definite purpose, to try to be conscious of the inner working of the body, to bring consciousness in the very cells of the body. We could say that sports in the Ashram is Yoga of the physical being to train the body, keeping in mind that it is a temple wherein dwells the Divine, and that the structure must be kept clean and strong, the body made supple and vibrant to withstand the rigours of yoga. ❧



# A SEED REMEMBERS...

The Class of 1990 completes the silver jubilee of its graduation from SAICE — an occasion to reunite, renew the connection with the Alma Mater and remember with gratitude the contribution it has made in our lives. *Auroposée '90* relives the golden years spent growing up in the special environment that is SAICE.

I too was a little seed many many years ago. One day, I found myself in this garden that was full of joy and light and beauty. There were many other little seeds too. They had come from different lands, but now they all breathed the same air and felt the same soil. It seemed strange and wonderful at the same time... all these tiny seeds, blown by different winds, all landing up in the same garden! Was it by chance? Was it destiny? Or was there something beyond

*"Je vous salue mes braves petits soldats, et vous donne rendez-vous à la Victoire!"*

The garden had many secrets and they learnt to unravel these together. They painted the sky and the ocean, they sang with the birds, and danced with the peacocks.

They hopped like the rabbits and ran like the deer. They even learnt to climb and swing like the monkeys. They played in the sand like puppies do and rolled down the slide like happy baby bears. Everything around them was so interesting and so much fun! With every passing day, the little seeds discovered new things. They were growing and developing their own personalities. They had their differences and preferences. They quarrelled and sulked and cried at times. But in the midst of it all, they learnt to live together, to recognise that they were all different seeds chosen by the same master gardeners.

*"Douce Mère, permets que nous soyons dès maintenant et pour toujours, simplement Tes petits enfants."*

Three years it took for the seeds to sprout and the tiny green shoots, happily bobbing their



The 'seed' in Kindergarten



Some members of the Class of 1990 in Delafon (Avenir)

reason and understanding that had brought them all here at once? There were too many questions! But the garden was beckoning and the fragrance and laughter were irresistible. So the little seeds eagerly stepped into this magical world of *Jardin d'enfants* and were welcomed to bask in the glory of its sunshine.



In EAVP 6, with Jhumur-di and Swadesh-da

heads, hopped onto the cart that led them to a garden that paved the way to the future. In *Avenir* they were watered and cared for but were also introduced to new paths of adventure. They encountered numbers and alphabets and were taught to identify, draw, and communicate with these symbols. Some were enthralled by the magic these numbers revealed. Some were enamoured by this new tool called the alphabet with which they could articulate their dreams and read the wonderful stories that others before them had woven. And some who found this web of letters and digits confusing simply enjoyed the warmth of the trees, the beauty of the flowers, the fish in the pond, and the endless games that teased and intrigued their inquisitive, imaginative minds and growing supple bodies. With kind and sensitive care the tender shoots were nurtured, with the reassurance and faith that no effort can ever go in vain.

*"N'oublie jamais que tu n'es pas seul. Le Divin est avec toi pour t'aider et te guider. Il est le compagnon qui ne faillit point, l'ami dont l'amour reconforte et fortifie... Aie la foi, Il fera tout pour toi."*

Three more fleeting years zoomed past on the wings of time...the tiny shoots had grown into little plants, with their first buds unfurling their petals to an inviting golden sun. The energising rays lured them to yet another garden with the promise of *Progrès*. This was indeed a huge leap. They saw shapes and found locations of lands and seas, and heard the past and origins

of what they could only know and see in the present. They discovered how clouds shower rain and why leaves are green and what makes the rainbow smile. They grew stronger too and more agile. In the *grande école* there was more of everything that contributed to the formation of

strong and confident individuals.

*"Fais de nous les guerriers héroïques que nous aspirons à devenir, pour livrer avec succès la grande bataille de l'avenir qui doit naître, contre le passé qui veut durer; afin que les choses nouvelles puissent se manifester et que nous soyons prêts à les recevoir."*

But this was not enough. They wanted to see more, find more, do more. They wished to chisel their skills and become more able soldiers. So the adolescent plants bursting with thirsty blossoms moved to an orchard that could quench their aspiration for innovation and perfection. *En avant vers la perfection*, they observed far-off shining objects in the great dark hemisphere and examined miniscule details of the cells that make up the frog and the bee. They marvelled at how everything that goes up must come down, why a sound that hits a wall bounces back making the same sound, only softer. They drank in the richness of essay and drama and sank into the lyrical flow of rhyme and rhythm. They learnt the notes that can hum a soulful song and the beats that can inspire jingling feet. They felt the sheer joy of learning and experienced the pure bliss of such knowing.

*"Ce n'est pas pour notre famille, ce n'est pas pour avoir une situation, ce n'est pas pour gagner de l'argent, ce n'est pas pour obtenir un diplôme, que nous étudions."*

*Nous étudions pour apprendre, pour savoir, pour comprendre le monde, et pour la joie que cela nous donne."*





Christmas in Knowledge

Nine years had passed and the plants that had bloomed with the nourishment in the orchard hoped now to bear fruit. The young trees stretched out their branches seeking further knowledge. They yearned for the realisation of something higher, deeper, more satisfying. Finally, they were introduced to the Teachings, which covered every aspect of growing, developing, becoming. From the very foundations to the ideal, the whole cycle of birth and death was revealed to them. The secret and synthesis of these truths would lead them some day to a life beyond the ordinary, the mundane, the banal, towards the goal, the final destination, the Divine.

*“Comme une flamme qui brûle silencieusement, comme un parfum qui monte tout droit, sans vaciller, mon amour va vers Toi; et comme l’enfant qui ne raisonne pas et ne s’inquiète de rien, je me confie à Toi pour que Ta Volonté soit faite, que Ta Lumière se manifeste, que Ta Paix rayonne et que Ton Amour couvre le monde. Quand Tu le voudras je serai en Toi, Toi-même, sans aucune distinction; et j’attends cette heure bénie sans impatience d’aucune sorte, en me laissant couler irrésistiblement vers elle comme le fleuve paisible coule vers l’océan sans bornes.*

*Ta Paix est en moi et dans cette Paix je ne vois plus que Toi présent en toute chose, avec le calme de l’Éternité.”*

Another three years and the full-grown trees, immersed in the intoxicating nectar they had partaken, were ushered into the vast forest of the world. With their acquired discipline and conscious physique they braced themselves to experience life. With a heavy heart they said goodbye to the fragrant soil that had helped them grow. But they knew that no matter what they did or where they went, the master gardeners would be watching over them, guiding, protecting their every step. All they had to do was remember,



Final year, Christmas eve

with gratitude. They had been well prepared with deep roots, a solid trunk, strong branches, and flexible twigs. They were ready for the great adventure, where they would cross fresh meadows, find new pastures, and face challenging fields. But the perseverance and the prayer would see them through the toughest of obstacles.

*“Gloire à Toi, Seigneur, triomphateur de tous les obstacles.*

*Permits que rien en nous ne fasse obstacle à Ton œuvre.*

*Permits que rien ne retarde Ta manifestation.*

*Que Ta volonté soit faite en toute chose et à tout moment.*

*Nous sommes devant Toi pour que Ta*

*volonté s’accomplisse en nous, dans tous les éléments, toutes les activités de notre être, depuis les hauteurs suprêmes, jusqu’aux moindres cellules de notre corps.*

*Permits que nous Te soyons entièrement et éternellement fidèles.*

*Nous voulons être complètement sous Ton influence, à l’exclusion de toute autre.*

*Permits que nous n’oublions jamais de T’être profondément et intensément reconnaissants.*

*Permits que nous ne gaspillions jamais rien de toutes les choses merveilleuses que Tu nous donnes à chaque instant.*

*Permits que tout en nous collabore à Ton œuvre, que tout soit prêt pour Ta réalisation.*

*Gloire à Toi, Seigneur, Réalisateur Suprême. Donne-nous une foi ardente, active, absolue, inébranlable en Ta VICTOIRE.”*

The trees have now matured but are still young at heart. They look back in time and recollect midst joys and tears the nostalgic journey they embarked on together for those unforgettable twenty years. They have weathered many a storm and rejoiced during the spring. Some have travelled many a land, and many might have lost count of the days and the decades. They have all seen the turn of a century and the birth of a new millennium. But what has always drawn them together is the garden where they were sown as



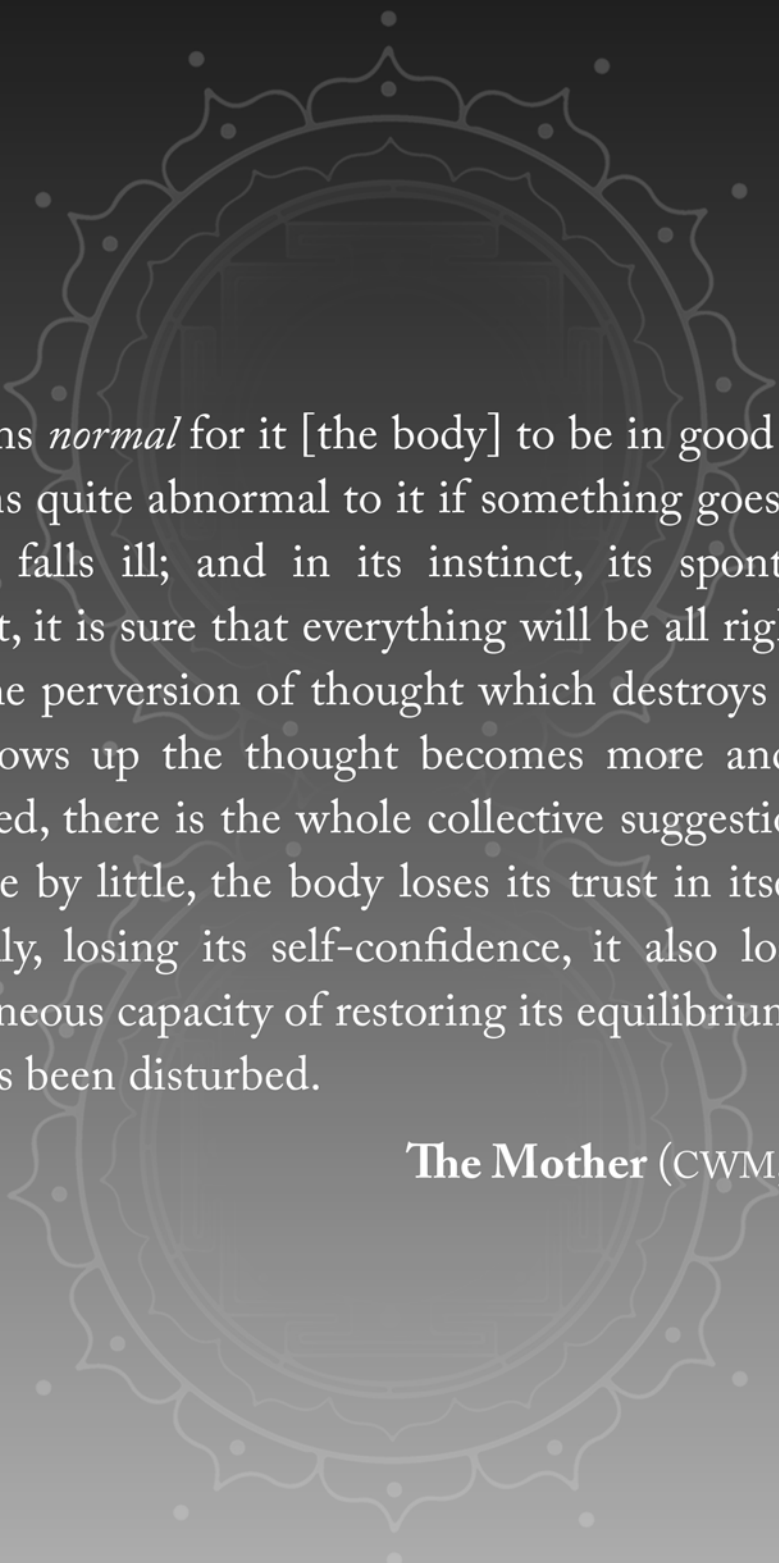
Vande Mataram, during the 2nd December programme

seeds. Twenty-five years and many seasons later, what binds them firmly to this soil is the love and care that have seeped into their very veins and sinews. Today, they clasp the earth they grew up on and offer a prayer of gratitude to the master gardeners.

*“À Toi qui fus le revêtement matériel de notre Maître, à Toi notre infinie gratitude. Devant Toi qui as tant fait pour nous, Toi qui as tant travaillé, lutté, souffert, espéré, enduré, Toi qui as tout voulu, tout tenté, tout préparé, tout accompli pour nous, devant Toi nous nous inclinons en implorant afin que nous n’oublions jamais, même pour un moment, tout ce que nous Te devons.”* ❧



Happy to reunite after 25 years



It seems *normal* for it [the body] to be in good health, it seems quite abnormal to it if something goes wrong and it falls ill; and in its instinct, its spontaneous instinct, it is sure that everything will be all right. It is only the perversion of thought which destroys this; as one grows up the thought becomes more and more distorted, there is the whole collective suggestion, and so, little by little, the body loses its trust in itself, and naturally, losing its self-confidence, it also loses the spontaneous capacity of restoring its equilibrium when this has been disturbed.

**The Mother** (CWM, 9: 163)